

U.S. SENATOR BEN CARDIN



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Dear Fellow Marylander:

Hate is on the rise in America and it has not subsided or tucked itself back in the shadows despite the last election results. Especially disturbing has been the continuation of anti-Asian rhetoric and hate speech related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

What emerged from Donald Trump and others giving oxygen to extremist groups and individuals through the use of anti-Asian terminology and rhetoric related to COVID-19, such as the “Chinese Virus” or “[Wuhan flu](#)” has continued to manifest itself with Asian Americans being harassed, physically assaulted and scapegoated for the pandemic.

Overall, there are about [23 million Asian American and Pacific Islanders \(AAPI\)](#) in the United States – that’s about 7 percent of the United States. In Maryland, the AAPI population comprises about 5.5 percent of our population. Also important, there are approximately [2 million Asian-American-owned businesses](#) nationwide that generate over \$700 billion in annual revenue and employ millions of workers.

Since January 2020, there has been a dramatic increase in reports of hate crimes and incidents against those of AAPI descent throughout the nation. According to a recent report, there were nearly [3,800 reported cases](#) of anti-Asian discrimination related to COVID-19 between March 2020 and February 2021.

Referring to this global pandemic by anything other than its appropriate, medical names has inflamed the worst stereotypes, fear, and xenophobia in the face of a public health crisis.

“Over the last year, in an unrelenting series of episodes with clear racial animus, people of Asian descent have been pushed, beaten, kicked, spit on and called slurs. Homes and businesses have been vandalized,” [according to the New York Times](#).

“The violence has known no boundaries, spanning generations, income brackets and regions.”

Blaming our Asian and Asian-American neighbors for the pandemic is simply wrong and reprehensible, and can have deadly consequences.

The worst of it came almost exactly one month ago, when we were all horrified to learn of a series of [shootings in the Atlanta area](#) that left eight people dead – six of them Asian American women. The suspect was taken into custody that day and he has been charged with multiple counts of murder. The investigation is continuing as to whether the suspect should additionally be charged with hate crimes.

All this comes as approximately two million Asian American and Pacific Islanders are putting their lives on the line daily, working as first responders and in [health care](#), law enforcement, transportation, supermarkets, and other service industries essential during the pandemic.

Anti-Asian hate did not start with COVID-19. But over the course of this pandemic, Asian Americans have seen the single largest increase in serious incidents of online hate and harassment, according to a recent survey by the [Anti-Defamation League](#).

We need to stop the hate. Every person in this country needs to call out the harassment, bullying and scapegoating whenever we see it so that we can work together as one community to overcome COVID-19.

This week, the Senate made some progress. We voted overwhelmingly – 92-6 – to consider S. 937, the [COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act of 2021](#). Led by my colleagues Mazie Hirono of Hawaii and Tammy Duckworth of Illinois, this is a bill I have cosponsored that will direct the U.S. Department of Justice to assign a point person to expedite the review of COVID-19-related hate crimes, provide federal support for state and local law enforcement agencies to respond to these hate crimes and coordinate with government partners to mitigate racially discriminatory language used to describe the pandemic. We are on track to pass this legislation next week.

[President Joe Biden](#) has taken action, as well. Shortly after his inauguration, he made an important statement by issuing a formal [Presidential Memorandum “Condemning and Combating Racism, Xenophobia, and Intolerance Against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States.”](#) As recent as this week, he appointed [Erika Moritsugu](#) as a deputy assistant to the president and the senior liaison to Asian American and Pacific Islander communities.

Here in Maryland, shortly before the shootings in Atlanta, the [United States Attorney's Office for Maryland](#) condemned the violence against Asian Americans and engaged its Civil Rights Unit to ensure that (1) the full spectrum of criminal and civil statutes are employed in addressing hate crimes and discrimination; (2) to conduct outreach to government, not-for-profit and private entities in Maryland; and (3) to help provide training and resources to local and state law enforcement in Maryland.

At the start of this Congress, I was privileged to be named as the [Chairman of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe \(CSCE\)](#), also known as the Helsinki Commission. I additionally serve as the Special Representative on Anti-Semitism, Racism, and Intolerance for the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. Over the past year, while the world has suffered the crippling impact of COVID-19, which has disproportionately affected the most vulnerable citizens, racist violence has been on the rise in many OSCE participating states, not only here at home. America needs to lead by example and I pledge to continue working to shine a spotlight on discrimination, racism, and anti-Asian violence both at home and abroad. Ideally, we will work in collaboration with our partners in the United States and around the world to share best practices and combat this growing threat of hate.

We need an all hands-on-deck approach to combat anti-Asian bias, prejudice, discrimination, hate crimes, and violence. Working together with our local, state, national and international partners – along with allies in the private sector and faith community – we can stem this dangerous trend and give a sense of peace and security back to our Asian-American neighbors, friends, coworkers and families. We can make our strong and diverse communities whole again.

Thank you for doing your part to put compassion and empathy first and calling out the hate when you see it.

Stay well.



Ben Cardin